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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 PARIS 03881

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PGOV, PFOR, FR, PINT

SUBJECT: FRENCH INTERNAL POLITICAL SCENE -- JANUARY

1976

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REF: PARIS 1222; PARIS 1104; PARIS 3155; PARIS 1391;

PARIS 3553.

SUMMARY: AS BEFITS A NEW YEAR, JANUARY WAS MARKED BY THE BEGINNINGS OF ELECTORAL MANEUVERS ON THE LEFT AND WITHIN THE MAJORITY IN ANTICIPATION OF UPCOMING CANTONAL AND MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS. CERTAIN SIGNS ALSO SUGGESTED THAT THE MAJORITY, IN PARTICULAR, WAS ALREADY LOOKING BEYOND THESE LOCAL CONTESTS TO THE 1978 LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS. GISCARD'S CABINET SHAKEUP AND HIS SUBSEQUENT MEETINGS WITH MAJORITY LEADERS LEFT THE IMPRESSION THAT THE PRESIDENT INTENDED TO TAKE A PERSONAL HAND IN SETTING STRATEGY AIMED AT RETAINING MAJORITY CONTROL IN THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY. SO FAR, IT APPEARS THAT GISCARD PLANS TO PLAY ON HIS OWN GROWING POPULARITY, COUPLED WITH AN IMAGE OF PRUDENT REFORM, TO CONVINCE THE FRENCH, AS HE DID IN 1974, THAT HIS COALITION CAN PROVIDE NECESSARY CHANGE WHILE AVOIDING THE RISKS ENTAILED IN A LEFT VICTORY.

THE OPPOSITION PASSED THE MONTH IN PREPARATION FOR AND PARTICIPATION IN VARIOUS CONFERENCES. THE SOCIALISTS ATTENDED THE HELSINGOR GATHERING AND HOSTED THE SOUTHERN SOCIALIST CONFERENCE IN PARIS, NEITHER OF WHICH WERE MAJOR SUCCESSES FOR MITTERRAND. AS PART OF ITS PREPARATIONS FOR A FEBRUARY 4-7 NATIONAL CONGRESS, THE COMMUNIST LEADERSHIP PROPOSED DROPPING THE CONCEPT OF THE "DICTATORSHIP OF THE PROLETARIAT" FROM ITS THEOLOGY. THE OPPOSITION ALSO TOOK TIME OUT TO ENGAGE IN SOME INTRAMURAL SNIPING AND TO TAKE STEPS OF ITS OWN TO PREPARE FOR IMPENDING ELECTIONS. END SUMMARY.

1. ELECTIONS ON THE HORIZON: SLOWLY, BUT PERCEPTIBLY, FRANCE ENTERED AN ELECTORAL SEASON DURING THE MONTH OF JANUARY. THE FIRST INDICATION CAME EARLY IN THE MONTH WITH A GOF ANNOUNCEMENT SETTING MARCH 7 AND 14 FOR TWO-ROUND CANTONAL ELECTIONS FOR DEPARTMENT COUNCILS (PARIS 1222). SEVERAL DAYS LATER, PRESIDENT GISCARD D'ESTAING CALLED A COUNCIL OF MINISTERS MEETING TO CONSIDER POSSIBLE REFORMS IN LAWS GOVERNING MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS, SET FOR MARCH 1977. ALSO DURING THE MONTH, CONFIDENTIAL
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SEANTORS CAILLAVET AND PELLETIER INTRODUCED A BILL CALLING FOR A REFERENDUM TO DETERMINE ELECTORAL MACHINERY FOR THE 1978 LEGISLATIVE CONTESTS. THE FRENCH WERE THUS REMINDED THAT OVER THE NEXT TWO YEARS THEY WOULD HAVE LITTLE RESPITE BETWEEN ONE ELECTION POST MORTEM AND THE RHETORIC INVOLVED IN GEARING-UP FOR THE NEXT CONTEST.

2. GISCARD TAKES CHARGE: GISCARD BEGAN TAKING STEPS TO PREPARE HHIS MAJORITY. THE FIRST WEEK IN JANUARY

SAW HIS LONG-RUMORED CABINET SHAKEUP. ALTHOUGH, AS REPORTED IN PARIS 1104, PERSONNEL CHANGES WERE LIMITED, CERTAIN ASPECTS OF THE EXERCISE PROVIDED COPY FOR COMMENTATORS. ALL AGREED THAT THE SHAKEUP HAD BEEN, FROM START TO FINISH, A GISCARD-CONCEIVED AND EXECUTED MOVE. MOREOVER, THE UNUSUALLY LARGE NUMBER OF POLITICALLY-UNATTACHED "TECHNOCRATS" LEFT THE IMPRESSION THAT GISCARD INTENDED TO "PRESIDENTIALIZE" HIS CABINET AND BY SO DOING DEEMPHASIZE INDIVIDUAL PARTY AFFILIATIONS. SOME OBSERVERS FEEL THAT THE PRESIDENT WILL INSTITUTE A MORE FAR-REACHING CABINET CHANGE LATER THIS YEAR.

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3. ALSO DURING JANUARY, THE PRESIDENT CALLED TOGETHER
PRIME MINISTER CHIRAC, MINISTER OF THE INTERIOR
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PONIATOWSKI, MINISTER OF JUSTICE LECANUET AND MINISTER
OF LABOR DURAFOUR TO DISCUSS MAJORITY STRATEGY FOR THE
MARCH 1977 MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS. AGAIN, THE IMPRESSION
WAS THAT THE PRESIDENT WAS TAKING PERSONAL CONTROL AND
THAT HE EXPECTED HIS PARTY CHIEFS TO DISCOURAGE INTER-
MAJORITY BICKERING IN THE INTEREST OF THE COMMON CAUSE.
LATER IN THE MONTH, GISCARD MET WITH THE SECRETARY
GENERALS OF HIS COALITION PARTIES AND THROUGH HIS PRESS
SPOKESMAN STATED THAT THE MAJORITY HOPED TO MAINTAIN
MUNICIPAL ALLIANCES WITH MODERATE SOCIALISTS IN ORDER
TO AVOID POLITICIZING SUCH LOCAL CONTESTS. WHILE THE
SOCIALISTS QUICKLY TURNED DOWN THIS PROPOSAL, THE
MESSAGE AGAIN WAS CLEAR -- THE PRESIDENT WAS HIMSELF
SETTING MAJORITY POLITICAL STRATEGY.

4. GISCARD EMPHASIZED THE POINT IN AN OPEN LETTER
DATED JANUARY 14 ADDRESSED TO PRIME MINISTER CHIRAC
LAYING OUT PRIORITIES FOR THE UPCOMING LEGISLATIVE
SESSION. SUMMARIZED UNDER THREE HEADINGS -- ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT, REFORM AND IMPROVEMENT IN THE QUALITY
OF LIFE, -- THE PROGRAM READ LIKE A PLATFORM ON WHICH
THE MAJORITY WOULD EVENTUALLY CAMPAIGN. GISCARD
FOLLOWED UP ON HIS LETTER WITH A FLURRY OF CABINET
MEETINGS AND ELYSEE PRONOUNCEMENTS. CONCERNING
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, HE APPROVED BASIC GUIDELINES FOR
THE SEVENTH PLAN WHICH CALL FOR GNP GROWTH OF NEARLY
6 PERCENT, AND SET FULL EMPLOYMENT AS AN OVERALL GOAL.
HE HELD A RESTRICTED CABINET MEETING ON ONE PARTICULAR-
LY CONTENTIOUS REFORM, A CAPITAL GAINS TAX, AND
ANNOUNCED THAT GOVERNMENT PROPOSALS WOULD CONCENTRATE
ON SPECULATIVE GAINS RATHER THAN THOSE ACCRUING
MORE "NORMALLY," SUCH AS THROUGH SALE OF A FAMILY
HOME. GISCARD ALSO PERSONALLY ARRANGED EMERGENCY
TAX RELIEF FOR LIP, A FRENCH WATCH MANUFACTURER THAT

FIGURED PROMINENTLY IN THE NEWS IN 1973 WHEN IT WAS TAKEN OVER BY UNIONS TO PREVENT A SHUTDOWN. SOME COMMENTATORS ARE LINKING THIS MOVE TO GISCARD'S DESIRE TO APPEAR OPEN-MINDED ABOUT CORPORATE REFORM, EVEN IF SUCH REFORM STEMMED FROM UNION PRESSURE RATHER THAN FROM MANAGEMENT WISDOM. THE OVERALL EFFECT OF HIS MOVES WAS TO SUGGEST THAT THE PRESIDENT WILL CONTINUE TO CONFIDENTIAL

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PUSH FOR MODERATE REFORM AND IN THE PROCESS ENDEAVOR TO DRIVE HOME THE BASIC MESSAGE THAT HIS MAJORITY OFFERS THE BEST CHANCE FOR CHANGE WHILE MAINTAINING ESSENTIAL STABILITY.

5. MAJORITY STRATEGY: JANUARY THUS PROVIDED A NUMBER OF INDICATIONS OF HOW THE PRESIDENT MAY INTEND TO PREPARE HIS MAJORITY FOR THE ELECTORAL STRUGGLE TO COME. THE MAJOR IMPRESSION WAS THAT GISCARD HOPES TO TURN THE CONTEST INTO ONE PITTING THE "PRESIDENTIAL MAJORITY" AGAINST THE LEFT, RATHER THAN ALLOWING IT TO TAKE THE FORM OF A NUMBER OF ENCOUNTERS WITH THE LEFT SQUARING OFF IN TURN AGAINST THE UDR, THE IR OR THE CENTRISTS. POLLS TAKEN DURING THE MONTH MAKE SUCH A STRATEGY APPEAR PARTICULARLY ATTRACTIVE. THEY CONFIRMED THAT, WHILE THE MAJORITY AS A WHOLE MAY BE SLIPPING VIS-A-VIS THE OPPOSITION, GISCARD'S OWN STANDING IS INCREASINGLY SOLID WITH THE FRENCH. ONE POLL SHOWED THAT 57 PERCENT OF HIS COUNTRYMEN WERE SATISFIED WITH HIS PERFORMANCE (UP FROM 50 PERCENT A YEAR AGO). ALTHOUGH FIGURES VARIED AND OTHER POLLS SHOWED LOWER LEVELS OF SATISFACTION, THE BASIC TREND WAS CLEARLY FAVORABLE TO THE PRESIDENT.

6. TOWARD THE CENTER: IF THE PRESIDENT PLANS TO TIE THE MAJORITY TO HIS OWN COATTAILS, JANUARY ALSO PROVIDED INDICATIONS THAT HE INTENDS TO MOVE HIS MAJORITY, AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE, TOWARD THE CENTER. ONE SIGN WAS THE ELEVATION OF A PROMINENT CENTRIST, JEAN LECANUET, TO THE RANK OF MINISTER OF STATE. ANOTHER, ACCORDING TO AN ELYSEE SOURCE, WAS THE INCLUSION OF TWO CENTRISTS, LECANUET AND MINISTER OF LABOR DURAFOUR, IN THE PRESIDENT'S JANUARY POLICY SETTING LUNCH -- WHILE THE OTHER TWO MAJORITY PARTIES WERE REPRESENTED BY ONLY ONE LEADER EACH.

7. GISCARD'S CAMPAIGN TO REVITALIZE THE CENTRIST WING OF HIS MAJORITY ALSO RECEIVED A BOOST DURING THE MONTH WHEN THE RADICAL SOCIALISTS (RS) AND CENTER REPUBLICANS (CR) AGREED TO REUNIFY. ACCORDING TO A

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COMMUNIQUE ISSUED BY THE TWO PARTIES, A COMMITTEE HAS BEEN FORMED TO WORK OUT MODALITIES, WITH FULL UNIFICATION SET FOR LATER THIS SPRING. WHILE THE CONFIDENTIAL

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CENTER REPUBLICANS BOAST ONLY ONE DEPUTY AND FOUR SENATORS, THEIR AGREEMENT TO UNITE WITH THE RADICAL SOCIALISTS WILL NO DOUBT BE PLEASING TO GISCARD, WHO REPORTEDLY HOPES TO EMPLOY THE RS TO ATTRACT MODERATE LEFTISTS INTO THE MAJORITY CAMP. JANUARY WITNESSED ONE DEFECTION FROM THE OPPOSITION IN THE FORM OF SENATOR PIERRE BROUSSE WHO LEFT THE LEFT RADICAL PARTY FOR THE RS. BROUSSE, WHO IS ALSO MAYOR OF BEZIERS, HAD LONG BEEN RUMORED TO BE CONSIDERING A BREAK WITH THE LEFT RADICALS BECAUSE OF THEIR ALLIANCE WITH THE COMMUNISTS.

8. UDR/IR: ELSEWHERE IN THE MAJORITY DURING THE MONTH, THERE WERE GROANS FROM THE GAULLISTS (UDR) OVER GISCARD'S CABINET CHANGE. UDR NATIONAL SECRETARIES CLAIMED THAT TWO-THIRDS OF THE NEW GOVERNMENT WAS CENTRIST AND ATLANTICIST. NEVERTHELESS, IT APPEARED THAT MOST OF THE PARTY WILL GRUDGINGLY GO ALONG WITH THE PRESIDENT'S DECISION TO BACK POPULAR ELECTIONS FOR THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT (PARIS 3155). UDR FEELINGS WERE ALSO BRUISED BY RADICAL SOCIALIST JEAN-JACQUES SERVAN-SCHREIBER'S JANUARY VICTORY OVER GAULLIST STANDARD-BEARER JEAN VILMAIN IN AN ELECTION FOR THE POST OF LORRAINE REGIONAL COUNCIL PRESIDENT. PARTICULARLY UPSETTING TO THE UDR WAS INDEPENDENT REPUBLIC (IR)SUPPORT FOR JJS. PERHAPS IN RESPONSE TO WHAT THEY VIEW AS INCREASING IR ACTIVISM, GAULLISTS ANNOUNCED THE FORMATION OF WORKER AND PROFESSIONAL ACTION GROUPS IN A NUMBER OF FACTORIES THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY. ON A MORE CONCILIATORY NOTE, THE UDR, IR AND CENTRISTS AGREED DURING THE MONTH TO SINGLE CANDIDACIES IN 60 PERCENT OF THE 1786 CANTONS INVOLVED IN THE UPCOMING MARCH ELECTIONS. PARTY SPOKESMEN CLAIMED THAT SUCH AGREEMENTS WILL EVENTUALLY COVER 75 PERCENT OF THE CONTESTS AND SAID THAT THIS SHOULD ASSURE A GOOD MAJORITY SHOWING.

9. THE LEFT: OPPOSITION ACTIVITIES DURING JANUARY WERE DOMINATED BY COMMUNIST (PCF) PREPARATIONS FOR THEIR FEBRUARY 4-7 PARTY CONGRESS AND BY SOCIALIST (PS)PARTICIPATION IN THE HELSINGOR CONFERENCE AND

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IN THE PARIS "SOUTHERN" SOCIALIST CONCLAVE. THE PS TOOK TIME OUT FROM ITS CONFERENCES TO TAKE PARTIAL CREDIT FOR PCF SECRETARY GENERAL GEORGES MARCHAIS' JANUARY ANNOUNCEMENT THAT THE FRENCH COMMUNISTS ARE DROPPING THE "DICTATORSHIP OF THE PROLETARIAT" CONCEPT FROM THE PARTY'S LITURGY (PARIS 1391). IN A REPORT ISSUED ON THE EVE OF THE PCF CONGRESS, THE PS ARGUED THAT APPARENT MOVES TOWARD PCF LIBERALIZATION WERE THE RESULT OF PS ELECTORAL GAINS RATHER THAN A SELF-GENERATED PCF DECISION FOR IDEOLOGICAL REFORM. SIMILARLY, PS FIRST SECRETARY FRANCOIS MITTERRAND TOLD THE HELSINGOR CONFERENCE THAT A "CRISIS" WITHIN THE PCF OVER THE DICTATORSHIP OF THE PROLETARIAT CONCEPT WAS NOT TO BE RULED OUT (PARIS 3553). SOCIALIST CRITICISMS NOTWITHSTANDING, JANUARY POLLS INDICATED THAT THE DECISION TO DROP THE DICTATORSHIP PROVISIO WAS PAYING OFF IN TERMS OF PUBLIC POPULARITY. ONE SUD-OUEST SPONSORED SOUNDING SAW THE PCF JUMPING 4 PERCENT. MANY OBSERVERS, HOWEVER, THOUGHT THAT MOST OF THIS INCREASE STEMMED MORE FROM PUBLICITY ACCORDED THE MARCHAIS ANNOUNCEMENT THAN FROM ANY LONG-TERM CHANGE IN PUBLIC ATTITUDES. NEVERTHELESS MARCHAIS' HANDLING OF THE MANEUVER SHOWED HIM CLEARLY IN COMMAND AND REFLECTS HIS RECENT GROWTH IN STATURE WITHIN THE PCF.

10. THE PCF DUSTED OFF AN OLD SLOGAN IN MID-MONTH BY TENTATIVELY FLOATING A CALL FOR A "UNION OF THE PEOPLE OF FRANCE." BASED ON ISSUE-BY-ISSUE AGREEMENT AMONG "LIKE-MINDED PROGRESSIVE ELEMENTS," THE BALLOON SEEMED ESPECIALLY DESIGNED TO TEST UDR REACTION TO A POSSIBLE JOINT CAMPAIGN AGAINST A POPULARLY ELECTED EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT. THE FEBRUARY PCF PARTY CONGRESS IS EXPECTED TO ELABORATE ON OTHER ISSUES WHERE SUCH A "UNION" MIGHT BE POSSIBLE. FOR THE MOMENT, THE MAJOR REACTION HAS COME FROM THE SOCIALISTS WHO SEE THE MOVE AS AN EFFORT TO OUTFLANK THE PS ON THE RIGHT.

11. MEANWHILE, THE LEFT, LIKE THE MAJORITY, MOVED TO PREPARE FOR THE FORTHCOMING CAMPAIGN SEASON.

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FOLLOWING THE DECISION BY MARSEILLE MAYOR DEFFERRE AND
LILLE MAYOR MAUROY TO CLEANSE THEIR CITY LEADERSHIPS OF
MAJORITY MEMBERS AND MITTERRAND'S STATEMENT OF APPROVAL,

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IT APPEARS THAT THE OPPOSITION WILL ATTEMPT TO ENTER 1977 MUNICIPAL CONTESTS WITH LISTS COMPOSED ONLY OF LEFTIST CANDIDATES.

12. POTPOURRI - MOST OF THE ISSUES ATTRACTING PUBLIC ATTENTION DURING JANUARY WERE HOLDOVERS FROM 1975. THIS WAS PARTICULARLY THE CASE OF "DEMORALIZATION" OF THE ARMED FORCES WHERE THE OPPOSITION FINALLY AGREED ON A JOINT RESPONSE AND CALLED FOR PUBLIC PROTESTS IN MAJOR FRENCH CITIES AGAINST THE CONTINUED INCARCERATION OF INDIVIDUALS HELD UNDER SUCH CHARGES. IN ADDITION, THE OPPOSITION DEMANDED A MEETING WITH MINISTER OF JUSTICE LECANUET, AND THREATENED THAT IF THE GOVERNMENT DID NOT SOON MAKE ITS CASE AGAINST THE ACCUSED, DEFENSE LAWYERS WOULD "OPEN THEIR DOSSIERS" TO REVEAL HOW LITTLE EVIDENCE THE GOVERNMENT HAD ACTUALLY PRODUCED. TOWARD THE END OF THE MONTH, THE GOVERNMENT RELEASED THE LAST SOLDIER HELD UNDER SUCH CHARGES, BUT SEVEN CIVILIANS REMAIN UNDER ARREST.

13. OTHER ECHOS FROM 1975 WERE CLAIMS BY BUSINESS FIGURES THAT THE GOVERNMENT WAS UNFAIRLY HOLDING MANAGEMENT SOLELY RESPONSIBLE FOR WORK ACCIDENTS. AGAIN, MINISTER OF JUSTICE LECANUET WAS THE TARGET AND THE NATIONAL CONFEDERATION OF FRENCH BUSINESSMEN (CNPF), CHARGED HIM WITH FAILURE TO APPRECIATE MANAGEMENT'S SIDE OF THE STORY. IN PARTICULAR, THE CNPF WAS EXERCISED OVER LECANUET'S JANUARY STATEMENT THAT MANAGEMENT HAD A PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY REGARDING WORK-SITE MISHAPS AND THAT PENAL SANCTIONS WERE JUSTIFIED IF ACCIDENTS CONTINUED.

14. OPPOSITION-LEVELED CHARGES OF GERRYMANDERING ALSO RECEIVED CONSIDERABLE ATTENTION IN THE MEDIA. ACCORDING TO THE LEFT, THE MINISTRY OF THE INTERIOR, UNDER ORDERS BY PONIATOWSKI, IS ENGAGED IN AN EFFORT TO FURTHER SKEW ELECTORAL DISTRICTS IN THE MAJORITY'S FAVOR. THIS WAS PARTICULARLY TRUE, LEFTISTS CLAIMED, IN THE PARIS REGION WHERE THE GOVERNMENT WAS TRYING TO ENSURE A FAVORABLE OUTCOME IN CANTONAL CONTESTS.

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15. FINALLY, PARISIANS DEVOTED A GREAT DEAL OF ATTEN-

TION TO THE ISSUE OF WHETHER DISEASED ELM TREES RECENTLY
REMOVED FROM THE PLACE DES VOSGES SHOULD BE REPLACED.
FIGARO AND OTHER NEWSPAPERS HAVE BEEN CARRYING THE
DEBATE AS FRONT-PAGE NEWS AND ONE TELEVISION STATION
HAS EVEN STARTED A POPULAR OPINION SURVEY ON THE SUB-
JECT. THE LATEST INDICATIONS ARE THAT THE TREES WILL
NOT BE REPLACED -- SUPPOSEDLY IN KEEPING WITH THE
ARCHITECT'S ORIGINAL DESIGN.
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